



National Union of Workers

**Preliminary Study: Office Physical Health
and Safety in the Market Research Industry
November 2007**

Aim:

The aim of the study was to gain a greater understanding of the prevalence of physical risk factors in the Market and Social Research Industry in Australia, and to identify risk factors of particular concern where further investigation and action is required.

Method:

The intention was to survey approximately 200 Market and Social Research employees nationally over a period of one month. The survey was used to fulfil three basic requirements:

- As a rich source of quantitative data on physical risk factors;
- To collect qualitative data on the views of employees concerning stress and anxiety; and
- To structure active deliberation and discussion on the matter amongst employees.

Results:

Total Sample = 270

Table 1: Workplace Injuries in the Industry

Personally suffered an illness or injury, or incurred medical expenses due to work in market research	17.8%
Witnessed co-workers suffer an illness or injury, or incurred medical expenses due to work in market research stress	17.8%

Possible Physical Risk Factors in the Industry

Table 2: Chairs/Backs

Adjustable backs of chairs at work	55.6%
The seats raise and lower properly	61.9%
Have hurt back sitting in a work chair	40%
Footrests are available in my CATI room/office	14.8%

Table 3: Monitors/Eyes

Suffer tired/sore eyes from looking at computer monitors at work	70.4%
The computer monitor is level with my line of site	58.9%
Anti-glare screens are available in the CATI room/office	11.5%

Table 4: Noise Levels/Hearing

Have suffered from sore ears/loss of hearing	37.8%
Sometimes has difficulty hearing the respondent	71.5%
Sometimes heard unexpected, short, loud bursts of noise through the headset	63%

Table 5: Air Quality/Temperature Control

Experiences a wide variation in air temperature between different parts of the CATI room/office	62.6%
The air conditioning in the CATI room/office works properly	58.9%
The office is too hot or too cold on a regular basis	49.6%

Table 6: Amenities

Can access a clean toilet on site when needed	81.9%
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Have ready access to clean drinking water when on shift	86.3%
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Table 7: General

Suffer from sore wrists, hands, or arms from computer use	39.6%
Wrist pads are available in the CATI room/office	12.2%
There are diagrams or information at the workplace which show the correct posture for sitting at the work station	59.3%
Information on OHS practices provided at training or on commencement at the workplace	40.4%

The Cost of Physical Risk Factors:

The study has shown that physical risk factors are a real challenge for the market and social research industry. As well as the direct impact on employees, physical risk factors also have potential direct and indirect cost impact on employers through the following:

1. WorkCover claims for stress;
2. Transaction costs of WorkCover claims;
3. Increased turnover;
4. Decreased quality of output; and
5. Decreased productivity.

Employees were also asked open-ended questions, and some of the responses identified the cost factors outlined above.

Potential WorkCover claims

- *“My eyesight has declined tremendously since my employment here...I have had three eye tests in 8 months purely because my eyes keep changing and found they were worse each time*
- *“...no easily accessible volume control, loud noises/faxes etc can not be easily muted. Put strain on ears, having to deal with call centre noise on one ear and call noise in the other – give me sever migraine”*
- *“Hurts the back because it [the chair] leans too far back”*
- *“Just mainly some of the old phones, have no volume adjuster so it can be quite deafening if you get a really loud respondent or fax”*
- *“Surveycraft uses 2 colours that contrast in a painful way on the eyes. Opposite colours in the same tone cause a reverberating in the eyes which causes the eye strain”*

Increased Turnover

- *“I am sick of blurry screens and screens that you cannot adjust”*

Decreased Quality of Output

- *“The noise level in the call centre is very often too loud and disruptive to be able to hear respondents clearly, especially on open-ended questions”*

Decreased Productivity

- *“The air is stale and I think the management is not educated in the work rate benefits of adequate oxygenation of the blood, hence the brain. Yes, even market researchers need that, contrary to rumours.”*
- *“I got sick after working here one Monday”*